

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PGOV, OVIP, US, TC

SUBJECT : BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON UAE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM MANA AL-
OTAIBA

1. ALTHOUGH YOUNG (BARELY 30) OTAIBA HAS HELD HIS POSITION AS MINISTER OF PETROLEUM FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND HE IS NOW AN EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONER IN MOST ASPECTS OF PETROLEUM AFFAIRS. OTAIBA HAS SOME PLAYBOY PROCLIVITIES (AND THE MONEY TO INDULGE THEM) BUT UNLIKE MOST ABU DHABIANS, WHEN HE IS ON THE JOB HE BRINGS INTELLIGENCE AND THOROUGHNESS TO BEAR ON WHAT HE IS DOING. THIS PAST YEAR HE HAS FOUGHT HARD--AND ON THE WHOLE SUCCESSFULLY--TO PRESERVE HIS POSITION OF INFLUENCE IN PETROLEUM AFFAIRS AGAINST THE ENCROACHMENTS OF THE RULER'S COUSIN SHAIKH TAHNOON AND THE ALGERIAN MAFIA THAT THE LATTER HAS BROUGHT IN TO HELP HIM RUN THE ABU DHABI NATIONAL OIL COMPANY. SHAIKH ZAYID LIKES OTAIBA, AND GIVES HIM BROAD TACTICAL LEEWAY AT OPEC MEETINGS ON THE PROVISIO THAT HE COORDINATE CLOSELY WITH THE SAUDIS. OTAIBA HAS USED HIS FREEDOM OF ACTION TO PLAY MEDIATING ROLE BETWEEN SAUDIS AND PRICE MAXIMALISTS, STRATEGY WHICH HE SINCERELY BELIEVES IS IN BEST UAE INTERESTS. AT LEAST TO HEAR HIM TELL IT, HE HAS PERFORMED THIS ROLE WITH
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SOME SUCCESS AT RECENT OPEC MEETINGS.

2. OTAIBA HAS MATURED CONSIDERABLY IN HIS VIEWS IN LAST YEAR. HE IS NOW CONVINCED PROPONENT OF CONTINUED EQUITY INTEREST BY MAJOR OIL FIRMS IN ABU DHABI OIL SCENE. IN THIS HE HAS PARTED WAYS FROM ROUTE WHICH SAUDIS, KUWAIT AND QATAR APPEAR TO BE TRAVELLING. HE DOES NOT MUCH LIKE FEELING OF ISOLATION THIS PRODUCES BUT SO FAR HE HAS STUCK TO HIS GUNS. HE IS ALSO SYMPATHETIC (UNLIKE THE ALGERIANS) TO PROFIT-SQUEEZE COMPANIES ARE EXPERIENCING UNDER PRESENT TERMS OF OPERATION HERE AND WANTS TO CONCLUDE NEW LONG-TERM ARRANGEMENTS WITH THEM THAT WOULD INCREASE THEIR INCENTIVE TO INVEST HERE. BUT HE IS RELUCTANT TO MAKE DEFINITIVE MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION UNTIL HE SEES OUTCOME OF INDUSTRY/GOVERNMENT NEGOTIATIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT.

3. OTAIBA IS PERSONABLE, HAS A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR, AND HIS INTERESTS EXTEND TO WIDE VARIETY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBJECTS. HE SPEAKS ENGLISH WELL. HE WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY HIS UNDER SECRETARY ABDULLAH ISMAIL, AN IRAQI WITH LONG EXPERIENCE IN PETROLEUM AFFAIRS. ISMAIL IS FIRST-CLASS INDIVIDUAL, BALANCED AND MODERATE IN HIS VIEWS, AND FRIENDLY WITH WESTERNERS.
STERNER

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